DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 369 IR 015 401

TITLE The Records Advisory Board in Local Government.
INSTITUTION New York State Education Dept., Albany. State Archives and Records Administration.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 10p.; For additional documents in this series, see IR 015 399 and IR 015 402.
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Access to Information; *Advisory Committees; Government Publications; Guidelines; *Information Management; Information Storage; *Local Government; Policy Formation; *Records Management

ABSTRACT

This information leaflet provides local governments with guidelines and suggestions for appointing a Records Advisory Board to assist in establishing and supporting a records management program. Such a program is an over-arching, continuing, administrative effort which manages recorded information from initial creation to final disposition. It includes systematically disposing of obsolete records; setting up filing and indexing systems; using modern computer technology in information creation, manipulation, and storage; storing inactive records securely and cost efficiently; microfilming selected paper records for security, ease of access, space consideration, and preservation of important information; overseeing the creation and use of forms, correspondence, and other records; and identifying, appraising, and preserving records of archival value. The advantages, benefits, and responsibilities of the Records Advisory Board are described, and suggestions provided for the composition of the Board. The State Archives and Records Administration contact address and telephone number for further information are listed. (DB)

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The Records Advisory Board In Local Government

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BASIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT
FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Records Advisory Board In Local Government

1991

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Introduction

This information leaflet provides local governments with guidelines and suggestions for appointing a Records Advisory Board to assist in establishing and supporting a records management program. A records management program is an over-arching, continuing, administrative effort which manages recorded information from initial creation to final disposition. It includes systematically disposing of obsolete records; setting up filing and indexing systems; using modern computer technology in information creation, manipulation, and storage; storing inactive records securely and cost efficiently; microfilming selected paper records for security, ease of access, space consideration, and preservation of important information; overseeing the creation and use of forms, correspondence, and other records; and identifying, appraising, and preserving records of archival value.

Advantages of a Records Management Program

Records document policies, decisions, and alternatives, and provide continuity with past operations. They illustrate the evolution of government and its services, such as law enforcement, health care, and public works. Records reflect the interaction between government and individuals, document governmental activities, and protect the rights of citizens. Good record keeping ensures open gov-

ernment, which promotes more confidence in public officials and greater accountability in the use of public funds.

Programs to manage records provide several advantages for local government. They save government resources and, in turn, taxpayers' money. They ensure that files and records are systematically arranged in such a way that minimal staff time is spent in costly searches for valuable information. They assist with the identification, retention, and availability of permanently valuable records.

An exemplary records management program is one that is anchored in enabling legislation. Such legislation establishes the government's lasting commitment to an ongoing systematic records program, and provides a firm legal basis by which the records program may operate.

Composition of the Board

A records management program can and should be an important part of local government. To organize and operate such a program efficiently, support of a Records Advisory Board is recommended. The Advisory Board should comprise the local govenment's counsel, the fiscal officer, and an administrative officer, preferably the chief executive official or designee. In county and municipal governments, the local historian should also be added to the Board. These individuals bring knowledge, authority, and expertise to the Board and are able to advise the Records Management Officer on the legal, fiscal, administrative, or historical value of records. Board members should be appointed by the governing body of the local government. This can be accomplished by legislation or merely recorded as appointments in the minutes of the meeting in which the action occurred.

Benefits of a Records Advisory Board

A Records Advisory Board serves essentially as an advisory committee to the Records Management Officer, but

provides a number of additional benefits to the records program and the local government itself.

- The appointment of a Records Advisory Board shows local government officials and citizens that the government is committed to the efficient and cost-effective management of records.
- If Board members represent the primary offices within a local government, they will be able to convey what they learn as members of the Board to their respective program staffs. The Board members are in positions of sufficient authority to ensure compliance with records management and archival practices throughout all departments of local government.
- The Board can fulfill an advocacy role by promoting the benefits of a records program to those officials who are in a position to allocate needed resources.

Responsibilities of the Records Advisory Board

Work of the Records Advisory Board should include, but not be limited to, the following responsibilities:

- **Provide Advice, Guidance, and Support to the Records Program.** Support and guidance from the Records Advisory Board is not only crucial during the implementation phase of the records management program, but must be an ongoing process. The Board can assist the Records Management Officer in developing and implementing policies and procedures, defining program goals and objectives, drafting position descriptions, and hiring staff. The Board should have input into major decisions involving the program, such as the construction of a records center or the implementation of a microfilm or automation program. The Board should review the performance of the program regularly and propose modifications and improvements.
- **Work with Local Government Officials and Their**

Professional Associations. The Records Advisory Board should promote understanding of program goals and the value of good records management and archival practices within government.

- **Promote Public Awareness.** The Board should develop ways of attracting public interest for local records issues. It should promote public use of records, and develop support for the records program. The Board needs to be familiar with public information and public relations tools and be able to suggest to the proper local officials ways of reaching and informing the public and government officials of the important uses of historical records and the cost effectiveness of the records program.

- **Advise the Records Management Officer.** Due to the diversity and rapidly changing functions of local government, the Records Management Officer may find that certain record series may not be listed on records retention and disposition schedules issued by SARA. The Board should review all appropriate Archives' schedules and advise the Records Management Officer on the development of any new records retention periods. It may also provide advice on particular records management problems or issues.

- **Provide Advice on Archival Records.** Certain records warrant permanent retention because of their long-term legal, fiscal, administrative or research value. Board members need to have an understanding of that long-term value, and should provide assistance in the appraisal process.

- **Review All Requests for the Disposition of Records.** With its diverse makeup and expertise in varied areas of government, the Board should be well qualified to review periodically requests for the disposition of records that have passed their retention periods. A local government historian can have important input at this point in ensuring that records with possible historical value are retained.

More Information

The State Archives and Records Administration has additional leaflets on topics such as writing an ordinance to establish a records management program and the role of a Records Management Officer in the records management program.

The Local Government Records Bureau is charged with providing advisory services to all local governments in the State with the exception of New York City. Services include publications, articles, presentations, records retention and disposition schedules, as well as advice about microfilming, storage facilities, and automation. For further information, please contact:

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